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ABSTRACT

Most students prefer visual input--through normal development or instructional reinforcement--yet, most teachers provide information to be taken in by listening. This mismatch can confound the learning process. To determine how well teachers listen and what their preferences might be, more than 300 Arkansas educators (predominantly female public high school teachers) provided data about listening effectiveness and personality preferences. Data indicated that the representative sample from the collegiate and pre-collegiate arenas, public and non-public, listened equally well--exceeding national norms. Questions were raised as to whether their performance matched their preferences and what their interaction potential was with students different from themselves. (Contains 29 references, 4 tables, and a figure of data.) (Author/RS)

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**An Examination of Listening Effectiveness of Educators:
Performance versus Preference**

Presented at the 1997 Annual Convention
of the International Listening Association
Mobile, Alabama

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RUNNING HEAD: Listening Effectiveness

[The author is also a past president of the International Listening Association and a certified trainer
in Process Communication.]

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An Examination of Listening Effectiveness of Educators:

Performance versus Preference

Abstract

Most students prefer visual input— through normal development or instructional reinforcement— yet, most teachers provide information to be taken in by listening. This mismatch can confound the learning process.

To determine how well teachers listen and what their preferences might be, more than 300 educators provided data about listening effectiveness and personality preferences. The data showed that the representative sample from the collegiate and pre-collegiate arenas, public and non-public, listened equally well— exceeding national norms. Questions were raised as to whether their performance matched their preferences and what their interaction potential was with students different from themselves.

Introduction

People who become professional educators typically justify their career choices in terms of helping others, structuring logical learning sequences and environments, or offering the citizens of tomorrow things which are valuable and important. They see students as ready receivers of what they have to offer in the way they offer things and presume their students will thrive. If students are indeed prepared to receive the help, learning opportunities, and things of value, then schools are marvelous places for stimulated minds. Students are motivated, and they move through the various continua unimpeded, for the most part.

But school is not often the ideal and idyllic environment where all is well and there are no problems. Students who are not motivated by their teachers, by school, or by life in general do all in their power to interact in a way to get what they need. These students are often characterized as *at-risk*. Part of this interaction is connecting with the teacher.

One aspect of managing a student successfully is related to whether the student and the teacher are “connecting” along open doorways of communication. If there is miscommunication, we can predict that negative coping strategies will be used by both the teacher and the student. These negative coping strategies are correlated to the personality part the individuals are using and the positive energy they have available. (Knaupp, n. d., p. 8)

Negative coping strategies of teachers are usually sanctions for misbehavior. Negative coping strategies for students usually involve inappropriate behaviors to get their needs met (with

or without their conscious awareness).

Connecting with others is at the heart of communication— defined best as when one understands what another wants to be understood (Johnson, 1972). The key to this understanding is listening. The model is simple, but the practice is difficult. People are in positions to listen at least one-half of the available communication time— students find themselves in listening situations much more time. One might presume that available time translates into effective practice; however, most people have never been taught the *skill* of listening. Hence, it is not surprising that most do not do it well. As a result, listening by most is ineffective, including the educators who demand it be done by their students.

Teachers demand that students conform to the way in which they are to learn and to behave. Yet, not every student is comfortable with this prescription. Students have differing learning styles and ways of processing information (Gregorc, 1982); Kolb, 1984; McCarthy, 1980); and Barbe & Swassing, 1979). Implications in personality characteristics were described by Myers and Briggs (1943, 1976, 1985) and Noland (1978). Most of these models attempt to depict an individual with regard to one or several aspects of personality and suggest that the individual functions in life and in learning situations with the manifestations of that characterization.

Using Kahler's (1982) Process Communication Model (described below) to identify personality types and preferences, Gilbert reported the relationship between the interaction energy and performance (grades) of students. This relationship was a comparison of student personality type and teacher-designated grades. If one interprets a grade (criterion-referenced performance) as the ability of the student to meet the teacher's expectations, it is not surprising that those most like the teacher will fare particularly well. Table 1 shows the significant correlations ($p < .05$) derived from the previous research (Gilbert, 1994).

Table 1

Correlations of Interaction Energy with Student Grade-Point Average

Personality

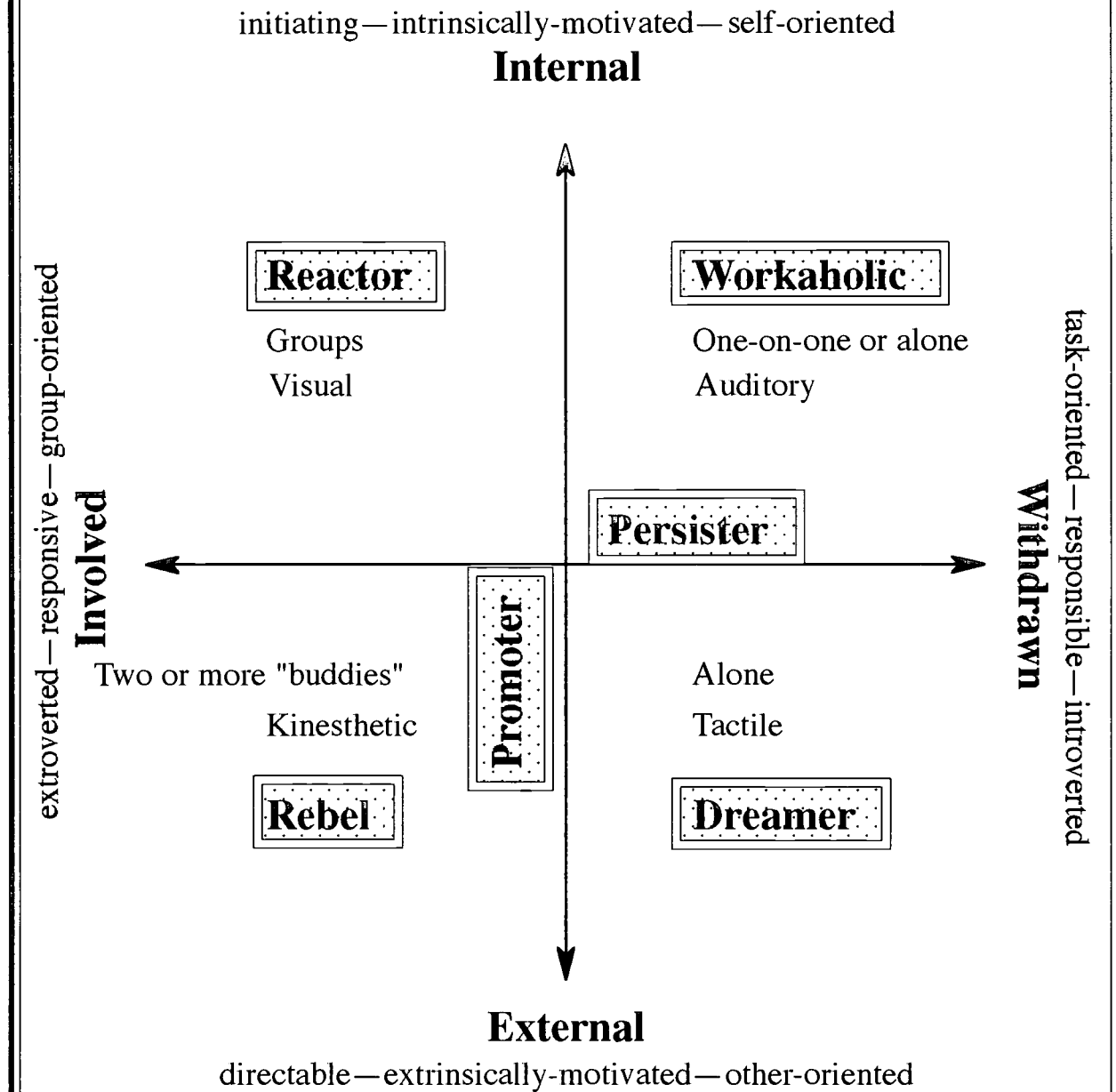
Type

Reactor	0.4101
Workaholic	0.3660
Persister	0.3591
Dreamer	0.3396
Rebel	0.0889
Promoter	-0.2496

The Process Communication Model (Kahler, 1982) places six personality types in one of four quadrants on an Assessing Matrix (Figure 1), the two axes of which describe continua from Involved to Withdrawn and Intrinsically- to Extrinsically-Motivated. Teacher types tend to be more Intrinsically-Motivated, spanning the full range from Involved to Withdrawn. Poor-performing (at-risk) students fall into the quadrant which describes them mostly as Involved and Extrinsically-Motivated. Those types that had the weakest correlations *need* playful contact (Rebels) or incidence (Promoters) to stay energized and prefer to interact with others like themselves. Their main preferred intake mode is *kinesthetic*— provided on a limited basis by most teachers.

Another study focusing on aspects of Process Communication showed similar results : “...a student’s grade is significantly affected by the student’s personality type base...” (Wallin, 1992, p. iii). Teachers trained in Process Communication may positively affect student performance through understanding student needs and preferences (Hawking, 1995). When teachers had been trained to use another model, the “Learning Styles Inventory,” there were mixed results in improved achievement of 21 at-risk ninth graders, (O’Sullivan, Puryear, & Oliver,

Figure 1
ASSESSING MATRIX FOR EDUCATORS



1994). They suggested these results were attributable to the attitudes of the teachers and their enthusiasm toward the program.

Class size may confound the individualized activities or learning input necessary to access those students who do not respond readily to the teacher's predominant mode of instruction (Coty, 1994). Learning to listen carefully and critically were key aspects of improved student involvement.

H. A. Murray's 1938 work, *Explorations in Personality*, suggested important concepts: "...personal needs, defined as motivational personality characteristics, represent tendencies to move in the direction of certain goals, whereas (the classroom environment) provides an external situational counterpart that supports or frustrates the expression of internalized personality needs. Therefore, situational variables found in the classroom environment may account for a significant amount of behavioral variance." (Pierce, 1994, p. 38)

In the needs of at-risk learners, "A climate that is focused primarily on production and outcomes reinforces (student) insecurities (about classroom performance). They associate the classroom environment with failure; expecting to fail, they often do" (Pierce, 1994, p. 38).

Environmental and instructional strategy flexibility provide ways in which all learners can be accessed (motivated). Subscribing to this approach allows educators to explode one of the long-standing myths: "You can't let them move around; they are too disruptive" (Pope, 1994, p. 7). Moving away from traditional patterns by recognizing different learner needs gives teachers a plethora of approaches (and permission to use them).

Many educators limit the way in which they offer and process information. Sometimes even good teachers may assume mistakenly that teaching strategies that worked previously will work with all children. Educators must listen carefully and collaboratively to communicate successfully (Wilmore, 1995). Knowing how to accommodate different patterns and perceptions expands the interaction effectiveness most educators seek.

Purpose of the Study

Because listening occupies such a predominant place in most classroom instruction—far in excess of the non-instructional use noted by Rankin, Nichols, Steil, and others (Gilbert, 1989)—the purpose of the study was to determine how well educators perform the skill they require most students to use 65-90 percent of classroom time. Moreover, the research focused on whether some types of educators listened more effectively than others. It was presumed that those educators who are withdrawn and intrinsically-motivated would listen better than other educator types.

An ancillary purpose was to document what patterns—perceptual and motivational—predominate with educators. A corollary problem was to determine how able educators are to interact with others, especially those unlike themselves. These aspects would suggest how likely educators are to adapt to others.

Instrumentation

Listening effectiveness was determined by an overall score on the *Watson-Barker Listening Test (WBLT)* (Watson & Barker, 1995), standardized for adult audiences and divided into five sections: (1) evaluating message content, (2) understanding meaning in conversations, (3) understanding and remembering information, (4) evaluating emotional meanings in messages, and (5) following directions and instructions. Personality patterns were derived from the *Kahler Personality Pattern Inventory (PPI)* (Kahler, 1982).

The *WBLT* took approximately 20 minutes to administer in group settings. The *PPI* was completed individually in 15-20 minutes. Data were collected during the summer and fall of 1996.

Several thousand subjects across the United States were used to refine and validate the *WBLT*, including executives, professionals, government employees, and undergraduate/graduate students from a variety of universities and curricula. Pilot tests were subjected to factor analyses, item analyses, reliability tests, and descriptive analyses. Face validity of each item was judged by a panel of listening experts (Watson & Barker, 1995). In addition, Roberts (1986 & 1988) and others (as reported in Watson & Barker, 1995) reported the *WBLT* to be valid.

Kahler's work has its foundations in transactional analysis, which suggests that certain ego states (Parent, Adult, or Child) describe behavior. Each person has an individual structure of personality types— a *base*, the strongest part, and each of the other five personality types in decreasing strength. Each personality type has character strengths, psychological (motivational) needs, communication preferences, and predictable patterns and behaviors that occur when one is in distress.

The *PPI* is valid and reliable and has checks for questionable validity based on response patterns. Two hundred four items were administered to 180 people, representing each of the identified personality types, to determine face, concurrent, and predictive validity. Only items with a correlation greater than .60 ($p < .01$) were accepted for inclusion in the final inventory (Kahler Communications, n. d.).

The data used for this research were the Base, Phase, Perceptions, Psychological Needs, and Interaction Span determinations from the *PPI*, and the overall and subscores on the *WBLT*. These allowed for an analysis of the relationship between one's personality patterns and listening effectiveness, including each of the submeasures. The demographic categories (independent variables) were: gender, site, educational level of work (elementary, middle, high, central-administrative), and sector (public, private, parochial).

Sample

The original research design only included university faculty in a college of professional educator preparation. Because teachers are teachers, regardless of the venue or audience, the decision was made to expand the sample to include professional educators from the precollegiate arena as well. Data were gathered from 322 subjects.

The sample was predominantly female ($n = 238$, 74%) from public ($n = 302$, 94%) high schools ($n = 177$, 55%). The sites included one university, two elementary schools, one middle school, three high schools, one school district, one private school, and principals from a statewide parochial system. All of the subjects worked in Arkansas.

Educator Types

Educators tend to predominate with three personality types described by the *Process Communication Model (PCM)* (Kahler, 1982)– Reactors (“*feelers*”), Workaholics (“*thinkers*”), and Persisters (“*believers*”). This array is explained because of the probable reasons people choose education as a profession (see Introduction above): in the strongest part of their personalities, they are *compassionate, sensitive and warm* (Reactors) and want to help others; they are *logical, responsible and organized* (Workaholics) and can structure learning activities in sequences, in a timely fashion, and in rational ways; or they are *conscientious, dedicated and observant* (Persisters) and understand what they believe is valuable and important to teach and be learned.

The *PCM* contends that each of us has a personality depicted as a six-story building. The first floor is our *base* personality, observable by six months of age. The order of the remaining five floors is set by age seven. Each successively higher floor is less well “furnished” than those below. This furnishing relates to the amount of relative energy available to each person in those aspects of personality.

A unique feature of the *PCM* is Phase. This describes that aspect of one’s personality where needs are attempted to be fulfilled– one’s motivation. This may be found in one’s Base (33%) or in movement to the next higher floor (Phase change) of the personality structure (67%). Ninety-nine percent of those who experience a Phase change do so as a result of long-term distress with and resolution of a particular life issue (T. Kahler, personal communication). Interestingly, this evolution occurs without or without one’s awareness. These life issues are as follows for the six *PCM* Personality Types:

<u>Personality Type</u>	<u>Issue for Phase Change</u>
Reactor	Anger
Workaholic	Grief
Persister	Fear
Dreamer	Self-Confidence

Rebel Self-Love
 Promoter Abandonment/Bonding

Eighty-nine percent of the group were Base Reactors (41%), Workaholics (12%) and Persisters (36%), and 74 percent were Phase Reactors (21%), Workaholics (24%) and Persisters (29%). Almost 68 percent of the group was either Base or Phase Reactor, Workaholic or Persister, or a combination of two out of the three. These data show this group of educators was ten percent Base Rebels (with no Base Promoters) and 16 percent Phase Rebels (10%) or Promoters (6%). The comparative data between the general population and the research sample are shown in Table 2. [Note: Not all of the subjects completed both the *PPI* and the *WBLT*.]

Table 2

Distribution of Personality Types

Personality Type	General Population	Educator Base	Educator Phase
Reactor	30%	41%	21%
Workaholic	25%	12%	24%
Persister	10%	36%	29%
Dreamer	10%	4%	10%
Rebel	20%	7%	10%
Promoter	5%	—	6%

It was interesting to note that none of the sample group of educators was Promoter-based—that is, no one who chose education did so from a base of being *adaptable, persuasive and charming* and experiencing the world through actions. Also noteworthy were the data indicating that 20 percent of the group was Reactor base/Persister phase and 14 percent of the group was Persister base/Reactor phase. People whose base and phase are the same have not experienced a need to move above their base characteristics—that is, their perceptions, needs and other aspects of

their personalities are all drawn from their base. The Base and Phase frequencies are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Educator Demographics

		<u>Phase</u>					
	Reactor	W'holic	Persister	Dreamer	Rebel	Pr'moter	Total
<u>Base</u>							
Reactor	4	23	48	13	9	2	99
W'holic	7	–	13	2	2	5	29
Persister	34	32	3	5	10	3	87
Dreamer	2	–	4	4	–	–	10
Rebel	4	3	3	1	3	3	17
Pr'moter	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total	51	58	71	25	24	13	242

Again, the concept of *Phase* is unique to the Process Communication Model and adds to its comprehensiveness. Experiencing a Phase change means that one's motivators change. If one is a Reactor (base) in Persister phase, then that person is most easily motivated by *recognition for work* and *acceptance of convictions*– these are the psychological needs of Persisters. However, that individual still experiences the world most easily through feelings (Reactor perceptual preferences), but, in this case, will appear more like a Persister, in many of the words, tones, dress, and environmental preferences of the Persister-type person.

One of the more interesting categories generated from the Kahler *Personality Pattern Inventory* is Interaction Span– the amount of relative energy one has to deal with other personality

types. Given the distribution arrayed above, it is not surprising that most educators interact most easily (with the most available energy) with others like themselves. The data also showed a comparatively low amount of energy of educators in interacting with those most dissimilar to themselves. Table 4 shows the Interaction Span of the sample.

Table 4

Interaction Span of Educators

Reactor	69
Workaholic	69
Persister	72
Dreamer	32
Rebel	36
Promoter	25

Educators in the sample had high levels of energy to interact with Reactors, Workaholics, and Persisters. They also had a commensurately low amount of energy to interact with Dreamers, Rebels, and Promoters. What this means in practical terms is that those students who are most like them will thrive, and those least like them will flounder. This echoes the student performance information reported by Gilbert (1994) above.

Results

The overall mean of the 322 people who completed the *Watson-Barker Listening Test (WBLT)* was 15.30 out of a possible 20. This converts to a mean score of 76.5, more than 15 percent above the national median of 66 and the national mean of 66.4, both normed on a pretest basis in 1991 with a group of more than 3,700 managers, supervisors, and professionals (Watson & Barker, 1995). The five subscores on the *WBLT* are: (1) evaluating message content (CONTENT), (2) understanding meaning in conversations (CONVERS), (3) understanding and

remembering information (REMEMB), (4) evaluating emotional meanings in messages (EVALEMO), and (5) following directions and instructions (DIRECTNS).

The *WBLT*, short version, contains 20 questions. The scores on each four-response subtest were multiplied by 5 to convert it to a possible total of 100, the basis on which the national norms were calculated for the longer version. The means for each of the subscores, raw and converted, are as follows:

	<u>Raw</u>	<u>Converted</u>	<u>Norm</u>	<u>% Diff.</u>
CONTENT	3.19	15.95	12.8	+24.6
CONVERS	2.83	14.15	8.8	+60.8
REMEMB	3.15	15.75	14.2	+10.9
EVALEMO	3.33	16.65	14.6	+14.0
DIRECTNS	<u>2.80</u>	<u>14.00</u>	<u>16.0</u>	<u>-12.5</u>
Total	15.3	76.50	66.4	+15.2

The lowest subscore for the sample group of educators was in *following directions and instructions*, 12.5 percent below the national norm. All of the other subscores exceeded national norms by 10-60 percent, with *understanding meaning in conversations* showing the highest difference. The area of greatest proficiency was *evaluating emotional meanings in messages*, exceeding the national norm by 14 percent.

When comparing the mean subscores with each other using multiple *t*-tests, some significant differences were noted. They appear on the following matrix:

	CONTENT	CONVERS	REMEMB	EVALEMO	DIRECTNS
CONTENT		***		*	***
CONVERS	***		***	***	
REMEMB		***		**	***
EVALEMO	*	***	**		***
DIRECTNS	***		***	***	

(The differences between the means were significant: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.)

These data indicated that the weakest area of response—*following directions and instructions*— was significantly lower than three of the four other subscores; the strongest area— *evaluating emotional responses in messages*— was significantly higher than any of the other subscores.

Using analyses of variance, no significant differences were found when examining the overall *WBLT* score with each of the independent variables. That is, regardless of gender, work level, or sector, the sample of educators listened with equal effectiveness. Additionally, no differences were found in listening effectiveness between collegiate and pre-collegiate educators when they were regrouped in that fashion.

The *PCM* variables were the main focus of the research. No differences were found in the listening effectiveness of the sample on the overall *WBLT* score or any of the subscores when using *Base* and *Phase* designations.

Each completed *PPI* revealed whether or not the responses had *Questionable Validity* (QV). This is a category which reveals if a respondent: (a) consciously or unconsciously wants the results to appear favorable, (b) perceives the inventory as a test, or (c) is experiencing some physical or emotional distress. The sample was divided into two groups— those with and those without QV. No differences in performance on the *WBLT* were found.

One further examination was done using the Phase *Psychological Needs* (motivation) score

on the *PPI*. According to Kahler (1982), one is motivated from those needs. They are:

Reactor	Acceptance of self and sensory needs
Workaholic	Recognition for work and time structure needs
Persister	Recognition for work and acceptance of convictions needs
Dreamer	Solitude needs
Rebel	Playful contact needs
Promoter	Incidence needs

Because these needs are the basis for personal motivation and allow one to move to other levels of personality when needs are fulfilled, this factor seemed particularly important and interesting to the research. However, no differences in listening effectiveness were found using this variable.

Discussion

It was anticipated (presumed) that educators who are more intrinsically-motivated and withdrawn (Workaholics and Persisters) would listen more effectively than any of the other personality types, because they preferred auditory input. This was not the case with the representative sample of educators from both the collegiate and pre-collegiate arenas; no significant differences were found. Further, the group mean on the overall score on the *Watson-Barker Listening Test* was 15 percent higher than an extrapolated national norm.

Prior to the data collection, the presumption of difference was based on the various orientations and descriptions of the personality types identified by the *Process Communication Model* (Kahler, 1982). Workaholics and Persisters are motivated by a recognition for work— a focus on accomplishment acknowledged by others and a certain precision in functioning. They experience the world through *thoughts* and *opinions*, respectively. Knowing that Reactors are more people-oriented and need acceptance of self, that Dreamers prefer solitude with little or no interaction with others, and that Rebels and Promoters need the more kinesthetic interaction of playful contact and incidence led the researcher to the construct that there would be a difference in listening performance.

The lack of significant difference in performance raises the question of whether educators are unique in several ways. This uniqueness might project to the achievement orientation most educators would have—predominantly for their students or colleagues and, by example or extension, for themselves. That is, regardless of any extant preference or need, when called upon to perform, educators can do so. Achieving well on a listening test, especially a short one, might have been perceived as a challenge and an attainable one. Hence, these data suggested a distinction to be made between *performance* and *preference*—but the research design did not allow for this distinction to be verified.

The researcher, who oversaw the administration of all of the listening tests, observed some consistent flagging of attention as the test progressed. This may account for the poorer scores in *following instructions and directions*, which was the last subtest. Villaume and Weaver (1996) echoed that the longer version of the *WBLT* might also be fatiguing.

The ancillary outcomes were more interesting—those which related to the personality distribution of the sample of educators and the marked differences in the potential to interact with other personality types. Educators, as represented by the sample, predominate with three personalities—Reactors, Workaholics, and Persisters. They were either based (89%) or phased (74%) with one of the types, or combined (68%) in Base and Phase with two of the three predominant types. Equally interesting was that there were no Base Promoters, and Base Rebels were only ten percent of the sample (as opposed to the 20-percent North-American distribution); 16 percent of the group was Phase Rebels or Promoters.

This sample of educators, attributable to their personality-type distribution, had ample energy to interact with Reactors, Workaholics, and Persisters. Conversely, they had very limited energy to interact with Dreamers, Rebels, and Promoters.

Summary and Implications

Gilbert (1988 & 1989) reported that listening is required in classrooms and in other educational situations a majority of the time, but most educators have had little or no formal

training in learning and teaching the *skill* of listening. The result has been that much is lost when auditory input is the sole technique for conveying information (Steil, Barker & Watson, 1983). Since the gap between the need for listening and preparation in listening appeared to be consistent, the researcher wanted to examine whether certain types of educators listened more effectively than others. The representative sample of educators did not demonstrate significant differences in the performance of listening as measured by the *Watson-Barker Listening Test*.

Because of the researcher's familiarity with the *Process Communication Model*, which was used to type the subjects in the sample, questions were raised as to whether a short (20-minute) test was extensive enough to measure performance when other information about the personality types suggested different preferences in perceptions, needs, and interaction. An article published by Villaume and Weaver (1996) after the current research was completed suggested the *WBLT* may need to be revamped to be able to distinguish between the various submeasures by varying the degree of difficulty of the items. If the *WBLT* were to be revised, it might produce enough variability to allow any significant differences to surface— or, if available, another measure should be sought which examines the types of listening educators do and expect of their students. Also, an expanded version of the research design might include a brief survey of input preferences— auditory, visual, kinesthetic, or tactile.

A more conclusive outcome from the research was verification of predominant educator types and the potential to interact with others. Not surprisingly, educators have the potential to interact most easily with others like themselves. However, the sample demonstrated very limited potential to interact with those unlike themselves— types which comprise 35 percent of the general population, are more extrinsically-motivated, and who may respond more preferably to something other than the typical auditory and visual emphases in most classrooms. What this means is that educators should consider the preferences of those unlike themselves and find the *energy* and *strategies* to deal with them effectively, rather than insisting that they adapt to what is most comfortable for educators. Accomplishing this shift in approach requires that educators arrange to

get their own needs met and find sufficient energy to deal with others using different perceptions and motivational techniques, especially since many of these *others* might be categorized as at-risk.

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